



Heritage NL

Tilting

Traditional Skills Inventory Project

Edited by Dale Gilbert Jarvis and Andrea O'Brien





Tilting Traditional Skills Inventory Project

The Tilting Registered Heritage District, designated by Heritage NL in 2003, possesses a near complete range of traditional buildings and spaces associated with the inshore fishery, as well as a collection of gardens, agricultural structures, and a variety of traditionally made fences still in use in the community. Tilting's heritage resources, combined with its living traditions, offer strong potential for development that can bring economic opportunities for residents. Starting in 2022, the Tilting Recreation and Cultural Society (TRACS) and Heritage NL, in partnership with the Community Revitalization Research Program at Queen's University, set out to conduct a preliminary inventory of traditional skill holders in the area. Heritage NL and TRACS led a community conversation about historic skills, crafts, traditions, and local knowledge, with input from people of all ages and backgrounds to help document this important cultural information. The hope was to identify people who are the 'hidden gems' of Tilting traditions: storytellers, musicians, carvers, candy boilers, fence builders, blood pudding makers, lobstermen, keepers of beer plants, and experts on local folklife. This document is the result of that first phase of collection work and represents a starting point for future research, with many more tradition bearers, crafters, makers, and skills-holders to be identified.

If you know of someone who should be included in this report, contact:

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Alan “Al” Dwyer

- Fence Making and Repair
- Gardening

Born and raised in Tilting, Al has been making and repairing picket fences on his family’s land for decades. The fences are meant to mark land and once kept roaming animals out of vegetable gardens. Al collects pickets in the winter while cutting firewood. Any pieces suitable for fence making are put aside. Links of fence are repaired yearly or as needed. Spruce is most commonly used as it is more durable than other types of local wood. Each picket is braced in the ground before being nailed to the longer, and links are braced or “dagged” with pieces of wood attached horizontally from the fence to the ground. Al doesn't rind entire pickets, just small sections that will eventually peel away.

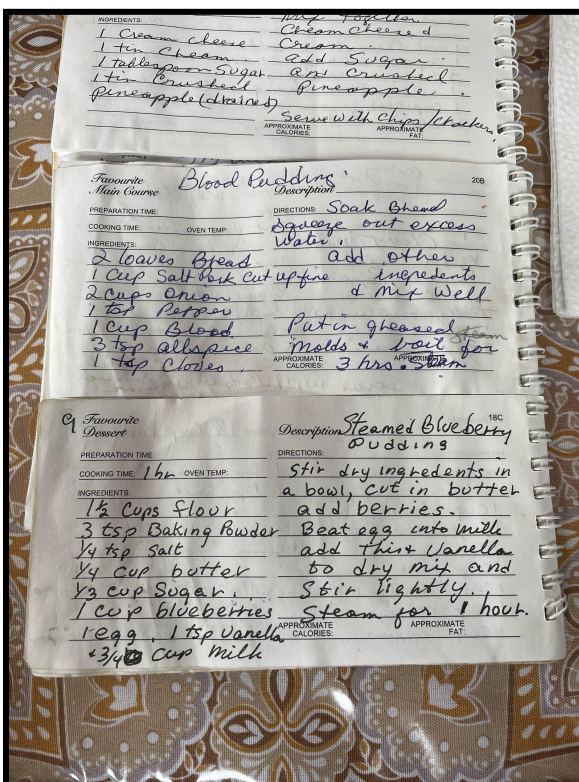


On rinding... “It ages better, dries better, and I think it's more durable... Water will get inside the bark and stay there and that will rot the picket.”

Christine (Penton) Dwyer

- Blood Pudding Maker
- Baking
- Quilting
- Sewing
- Knitting

Originally from Joe Batt's Arm, Christine inherited many of her food traditions from her mother, including the tradition of making blood puddings in the Fall. Christine remembers many families raising at least one pig. While slaughtering pigs in the Fall, the blood would be saved – and shared with other families. Steamed blood puddings – a mixture of blood, bread, salt pork, onion, pepper, allspice, and cloves – soon followed. The puddings keep for several months and are still a much loved treat in Tilting and other communities on Fogo Island. Christine continues the tradition by making and sharing blood puddings every year.



“Blood pudding meant Christmas.

And it was the same here in Tilting... Hurley's Store used to always have the big bucket of blood come in for Christmas.”

Clem Dwyer

- Woodturning
- Photography

Born and raised in Tilting, Clem was introduced to woodturning a decade ago when an instructor came to Fogo Island to teach a four-day course. Several months later the instructor called to ask if he was interested in a second-hand lathe. Clem bought the lathe and some chisels and hasn't stopped producing since. He makes mat hooks, bulb planters, cake testers, porridge stirrers, tree decorations, hairpins, coat hooks, milk can openers, and walking sticks. Clem's passion for photography began as a child when his mother bought a box camera. While attending university, Clem bought his own camera. His camera collection has grown and evolved over the years. Clem sells his woodturnings and some photos to Winds and Waves Artisan Guild, but stresses that both pursuits are more for enjoyment than profit.



On woodturning... "It took me a while to get [at it], but I love it now. When I'm home on the island, I'll be out in my shed... I don't advertise [to sell]. This is something I enjoy."

Lillian (Walker) Dwyer

- Hooking
- Quilting
- Knitting
- Embroidery
- Dying

Lillian grew up in St. Patrick's, Green Bay. Growing up she saw her mother sewing and crocheting and her grandmother knitting and embroidering. Except for embroidery, Lillian admits to not being interested in crafting in her youth. She did however have a passion for fabrics, and started collecting them at a young age. Lillian's interest in traditional crafts grew when she married and moved to Tilting. In the 1990s she attended a rug hooking course and went on to teach courses herself. She is a prolific hooker – making mats as gifts, for sale, and for commission to art galleries and art festivals. A founding member of Winds and Waves Artisan Guild, she credits the Guild for documenting traditional patterns, passing on traditional skills, and promoting innovation.



“It’s important that we save the old patterns and skills and bring them forward into newer and different designs.”

On fibre... “With rug hooking it’s mostly wools that I use, and the cottons with quilting. It’s a love of fibre and making things from fibre.”

Millicent Dwyer

- Sewing
- Quilting
- Dying
- Knitting
- Crochet
- Hooking
- Seal Skin Products

Growing up in Port aux Choix, Millicent observed her mother and grandmother sewing and knitting to provide clothing for their families. Those skills were passed on to her. She moved to Tilting in 1976 and continued making items for her own family. Prior to the establishment of the Winds and Waves Artisan Guild, Millicent recalls that women would meet in the Fire Hall in Tilting to learn traditional skills like rug hooking. The Guild was formed in 2009, and Millicent sees it as an important means of transmitting knowledge through generations. Currently it has 50 members, some who sell their work and others who produce for their own use. Millicent's main interest is quilting. She makes many at home and also works on group projects with the Guild.



On the Guild... “When the Guild formed you met the women from different communities...they had different patterns , they had different skill sets. So we all combined our knowledge...My skill set certainly increased.”

Roy Dwyer

- Writer
- Beer Plant Connoisseur

A prolific writer, Roy once wrote a play about a beer plant on very short notice – only a day before the performance. All that was required to start a beer plant was two or three packages of yeast, a gallon of water, and molasses or sugar. The beer would start to brew in as little as three to four hours, and many people drank it early in the fermenting process. But it was at its best after a week or so of brewing. Many people shared their beer plant rather than starting a new one. The base liquid was often divided and shared to start new brews. A single beer plant could be divided many times and last many years. The resulting beer was always drunk warm, not chilled.



“You'd loan a bit of your plant to somebody. When that built up with him he'd loan it to somebody else. So the plant never died out.”

Janis Foley

- Knitting
- Darning
- Sewing

Born in Tilting, Janis worked as an educator in Ontario before retiring back home. She grew up watching her mother and grandmothers knit and sew for family use. She completed her first sewing project – a blanket for her doll – when she was 7 years old. Janis also took courses in sewing in high school. She once crocheted, embroidered, and sewed clothing but is currently most proficient in knitting. Janis prefers using natural wool and bamboo needles when knitting. She uses both traditional and commercial patterns. She is a new member of Winds and Waves Artisan Guild, but gifts her knitting rather than selling it. She also sews items such as window blinds for her home.



On creating... “There’s some utility to it and there also is a matter of creativity for me too...like a hobby. It’s a bit of both.”

On handmade clothing... “One time you’d sew to be economical, to save some money, because to buy something would cost more, but it’s not always cost effective these days to sew.”

Maureen Foley

- Music
- Poetry
- Boiled Candy Making

Born and raised in Tilting, Maureen got involved with local heritage and craft conservation projects just after the cod moratorium of 1992. As young people left in large numbers to look for alternate employment opportunities, there was a concern that traditional knowledge and culture would be lost. This led residents to start focusing on cultural preservation initiatives. Maureen feels that they have done a good job of preserving the community's culture and remarks that even though young people have gone away they always want to come back home for a visit, especially during Feile Tilting celebrations.



"It seems like things are coming back; it seems that being crafty is in. When they get a certain age, they kind of want to know how to do those things."

Zita (Greene) Foley

- Quilting
- Knitting
- Hooking
- Crochet

Born and raised in Tilting, Zita completed her first sewing project (a dress for herself) when she was 13 or 14 years old. She grew up watching her mother sewing and mending clothes, knitting for the family, making quilts, and hooking mats. Her favourite craft is quilt making, and for the most part she doesn't use patterns but comes up with her own patchwork designs. She prefers this traditional way of making quilts. While her mother made quilts from reused materials, Zita admits that she loves finding and collecting new material. Zita is a member of the Winds and Waves Artisan Guild and sells her work through the Guild, including mats and quilts. While she pieces together most of her quilt tops at home, she enjoys going to the Guild's building to assemble layers on their large workspaces.



On creating... "It's just something that was passed down. And it's something that you love to do...it's a spiritual thing. It just relaxes you and it's part of you."

Eileen (Foley) McGrath

- Quilting
- Sewing
- Knitting
- Hooking
- Crochet

Born and raised in Tilting, Eileen learned to knit from her mother and to rug hook from her aunt. She grew up watching her mother make quilts and began making her own after she was married in 1979. She picked up other crafting skills from friends, by attending classes, and by participating in Winds and Waves Artisan Guild. She notes that her mother's generation sewed quilts and clothing and knitted mitts and socks for everyday use, whereas many present-day crafters produce items for enjoyment and sometimes for sale. Eileen has been a member of the Winds and Waves Artisan Guild since its inception. She also participated in weekly gatherings of crafters prior to the formation of the Guild. Most of the items she now makes are gifts, although she does knit snake pillows for the Fogo Island Inn.



On her mother's quilts... "There'd be about ten on your bed. You wouldn't be able to move. She made quilts [from] blocks, squares...whatever her material allowed her to make. There wasn't any pattern."

Jim McGrath

- Animal Husbandry
- Red Ochre & Cod Liver Oil
- Scythe Sharpening
- Bonfire Traditions

A longtime member of TRACS, Jim is a go-to resource for traditional folkways, with a detailed knowledge of raising sheep, folk architecture, subsistence gardening, local history, and the use of cod liver oil and red ochre. Cod liver oil would be produced by leaving cod livers in a barrel for up to a year and waiting for the oil to rise to the top. The mixture was regularly stirred throughout the year to help reduce the smell. After the oil had rendered, young men in the community would create a paint with the oil for use on outbuildings and the backs of houses. The paint was made by mixing the cod liver oil with store-bought red ochre powder. There was no set recipe or ratio for the paint, which would keep for three to four years.



On red ochre paint: "That would be on all your outbuildings: stages, stores, and stables. One thing that was unique in Tilting for just about everybody, the front [of houses] would be done in paint, and ...the back was done with red ochre."

Leonard “Len” McGrath

- Lobster Pot Making

Recently retired from fishing, Len only ever used homemade lobster pots. He figured out the dimensions and component parts on his own and would make dozens of pots every year. Len used vir (fir wood) for the frames, as it was easy to bend, and he cut his own logs for the laths. He would get the logs cut at a local sawmill and then he would rip the laths on his table saw. He also knit his own linnets for all parts of the pot. To weigh down the pots, he used either rocks or cement poured in shopping bags. Len usually set about a hundred pots every year.



“We always made our own pots, always... You’d have a fair stock of pots but every winter I’d usually make thirty, thirty-five, forty pots... After three, four years using them and rough seas, you know, they get weak, so you’d get clear of them then.”

Paula (Hart) McGrath

- Knitting
- Cross-Stitch

Originally from Fogo, Paula began knitting in Grade 11. She asked friends to make her a sweater in a Scandinavian pattern popular at the time. They offered to show her how to knit instead. She began knitting items for family, but after marrying and moving to Tilting in 1986 she began knitting custom orders. She has knitted smaller items like hats and mitts for local craft stores for several decades. She makes up most of the patterns she knits and uses both wool and acrylic. She can finish a hat in one night and prefers knitting to other crafts as she can multitask while knitting. Paula also cross-stitches occasionally, but mostly to produce items for special occasions.



On the salt and pepper stitch "When you're knitting the one and one pattern...you always keep either one colour ahead and one back at all times. You don't cross your wool. Once you cross your wool then you see the difference in the pattern. That was told to me by a good friend, one of the ones who taught me how to knit."



HERITAGE FOUNDATION OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

The mission of Heritage NL's Intangible Cultural Heritage Office is to safeguard and sustain the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Newfoundland and Labrador for present and future generations everywhere, as a vital part of the identities of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and as a valuable collection of unique knowledge and customs. This is achieved through initiatives that celebrate, record, disseminate, and promote our living heritage and help to build bridges between diverse cultural groups within and outside Newfoundland and Labrador.

Above photo courtesy Martin McGrath.

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